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TRAINING-SCHOOLS

FOR

Attendants in Asylums for the Insane.

BY

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TRAINING-SCHOOLS FOR ATTENDANTS IN ASYLUMS FOR THE INSANE.

BY RICHARD DEWEY, M.D., KANKAKEE, ILL.

An increasing interest has been shown in recent years in the special instruction and training of asylum attendants for their duties. This interest has grown in part from the difficulty of securing good attendants upon the insane and in part from the improved methods of care of sick patients which the nurses' training-schools in the general hospitals have rendered possible; while, as a whole, the efforts in this direction may be regarded as an outgrowth of the broader and wiser philanthropy of the times in which we live.

In these remarks, I shall aim to sketch something of what has been accomplished, and indicate the lines on which, it seems to me, the work still to be done must develop. Considering the nature of the work and of the material available for attendants, the prominent thought in my own mind is that simpler instruction and an attempt to limit the course to precisely that which the care of the insane requires, are the leading ways in which progress is to be made.

I take it for granted that arguments for the desirability and importance of any agency whereby the skill and intelligence of attendants upon the insane may be increased are not needed in this audience, and therefore make no effort to explain why training of attendants in schools is advocated for every institution for the insane. Schools have thus far been established for training of attendants upon the insane in the McLean Asylum of Massachusetts; in the Buffalo State Asylum of New York; in the Hudson River Asylum at Poughkeepsie, N.Y.; in the Indiana State Asylum at Indianapolis; and in the State Insane Hospital at Kankakee, Ill. So far as my knowledge extends, these are the only institutions that have entered systematically upon this work.

The first efforts were made at the McLean Asylum; and, even before the regular establishment there of a school, trained graduate nurses from the general hospital schools were employed for the care of the insane in that institution.

Then a systematic training of attendants was begun, and a course of instruction mapped out in a tentative way, which gradually assumed more and more completeness, until an organized and efficient school had been called into existence, which last year graduated a class of sixteen thoroughly trained and skilled female nurses, and this year another class of eight; while the first class of seven male nurses has already completed the first year of the required course.

Next, a noticeable effort in this direction was inaugurated in the Buffalo State Asylum of New York, marked by the preparation and publication by Dr. Granger, of the medical staff of that institution, of a little hand-book—the most practical and useful which has yet appeared—for the use of the classes and for the assistance of others engaging in like work.

The Buffalo State Asylum has graduated one class of trained female attendants, and must by this time have another class nearly ready to graduate, consisting of both men and women attendants. In neither of the two above-mentioned institutions were the men at first admitted to the classes. In the Buffalo Asylum, all attendants, both men and women, are now required to attend the school; and at the McLean Asylum only eight out of thirty-two male attendants are not members of the school.

Previous to the establishment of the Buffalo school, a beginning had been made at Flatbush, L.I., by engaging a graduate nurse from the Bellevue Hospital Training School to come and take direction of the care of all sick patients, and give instruction in a systematic way to the attendants in the female wards; a special effort also being made to improve the service, but not, so far as I understand, to organize a school.

The lady employed at Flatbush, L.I., was subsequently engaged at Poughkeepsie, N.Y., to take charge of the work of organizing a complete school in that institution; and an especial effort was made to induce graduate nurses of general hospital training-schools to enter this training-school for insane. But I have understood from Dr. Cleveland, the superintendent of the asylum at Poughkeepsie, that very few accepted this offer, and those who did so were found unsatisfactory,—not from any fault of the nurses themselves, but from a lack of previous experience with the insane and of adaptation for their work, it having been found that the nurses who have been accustomed exclusively to cases of bodily sickness are not only quite at a loss with care of insane persons, but have formed so strong a taste and preference for care of acute bodily disease, in which patients

soon get well or die, that they do not enter with interest into the care of the insane; and I may say further, I think it is considered an established fact that the ordinary training which nurses receive in general hospital training-schools is not required for the care of the insane, and would not fit attendants to be any more efficient in management of the average insane patient. For this reason, at the McLean Asylum, graduate nurses from general hospital training-schools are no longer sought as attendants.

At Indianapolis, in the Indiana State Asylum, a training-school for the attendants has been established for about a year, but has already graduated a class of thirteen women and one man, who were all attendants of long experience and exceptional ability and character. They had also received the benefit of a previous course of lectures and instruction given by Dr. Fletcher. I understand from Dr. Fletcher that his class for another year will have about one hundred members, and will include nearly equal numbers of each sex.

The training-schools of the McLean Asylum, of the Buffalo Asylum, and of the Indianapolis Asylum have all held commencement exercises, at which the graduates, on receiving their diplomas, presented some admirable papers of a practical character,—the outcome of their studies in the wards or of their class instruction.

At the Indianapolis Asylum, a prize was offered for the best set of notes on any given case of insanity; and thus were produced some very meritorious studies.

At the Kankakee Insane Hospital in Illinois, a school was established in November of last year, which was the result of an effort to embrace in the course of instruction *all* the attendants in the institution, of both sexes, and to give such measure of teaching and kind of training as could be applied to the *entire body* of those employed; and I must here ask the indulgence of the Conference if personal experience should seem to predominate unduly in what I have further to say upon this subject.

It was felt that the efforts heretofore made, which had embraced instruction only or chiefly of women, were doing only half of what it was important to do, and that, in copying so many features of the training-schools for nurses in general hospitals, some things were provided not needed in the asylum, while other kinds of training, quite uncalled for in the nurses' training-schools, were of the *first* importance for attendants upon the insane. A beginning was made at the institution of which I have charge by issuing a circular to furnish information of the proposed plan to all.

Attendants then in the service of the institution were all given the option of entering the school or not, but were informed that, eventually, it was expected that all the attendants in the hospital would be members of the school, and all newly engaged attendants would be required to enter the school. A general plan of the course of instruction to be given was also laid down in the circular.

Two years were to be covered by the course ; and all who wished to enter the school were required to sign an agreement to remain through the two years and take the full course, and were warned not to enter the school unless prepared to do this, as permanency of service was one of the incidental but very important objects sought in organizing a school.

A small sum yearly for books was to be the only expense to attendants ; and their pay was to remain the same as before, but with the understanding that those who eventually graduated from the school would be better paid than attendants not graduated.

About seventy-five of the one hundred and fifty attendants of the institution joined the school, nearly equally divided between the male and female attendants. The number has since increased to one hundred and twelve by new attendants coming in and old ones subsequently joining. The school is divided into four classes. Each class has one weekly meeting and recitation. Two classes meet at the same hour, on two successive days, in separate recitation rooms, the superintendent and one of the medical staff each taking a class and each giving the same lecture.

Some of the subjects of the first three months' lectures may be mentioned, and will best illustrate the difference between this instruction and any that would be called for in an ordinary nurses' training-school.

The first lecture treated of the fact that insanity was a disease, but a disease with the strange peculiarity that it could not ordinarily be managed or cared for at home. Attention was called to the unfortunate predicament of a sick person who has to be sent away from home and friends for treatment ; and the need that the asylum should supply, as far as possible, the place of home and friends was emphasized. Some of the reasons were also indicated why it was difficult always to realize that insanity is a disease ; and an elucidation was given, as simple as possible, of disease of brain and nerves and its effect upon mind and conduct. No effort was made to teach anything of anatomy or physiology of brain or nervous system, as these were regarded as subjects only to be approached with advantage by the

average student during the final months of the course. The question of responsibility of insane persons for their acts was fully discussed, as tending to show why the infliction of any penalty or punishment upon an insane person was inappropriate, and the means explained by which discipline could be maintained and good conduct encouraged without resort to force. One lecture was given to the subject of rights, duties, and privileges of asylum attendants, as related to the institution, to themselves, and to their patients; and emphasis was laid upon the fact that the sole object of the existence of the hospital and of the presence therein of any person in its employ was for the benefit of the patient and the protection of the public.

"Putting ourselves in the Place of our Patients" was the subject of two lectures, an especial effort being made to explain that the universal discontent of insane persons is a most natural feeling, due to their being deprived of one of the dearest possessions of life,—namely, *liberty*,—without being able to appreciate the reason for this deprivation; and means of promoting contentment by recreation and employment were discussed and explained.

One or more lectures each were given to the care of several different groups of the insane, as the noisy and violent, the stupid and melancholy, the suicidal and homicidal, and the untidy, mischievous, and unemployed.

The subject of another lecture was "The Sources of Danger to Life in Asylums for the Insane." A very elementary and easily understood description was then given of the leading forms of insanity in their outward manifestation, accompanied by studies and descriptions of cases. All means whereby neglect and abuse of the insane could be avoided were studied with especial care, and one lecture of the course was given to this subject.

These lectures and their subjects are mentioned because they are believed, in the main, to be unlike any heretofore presented. With each and every lecture of the course goes a set of very carefully prepared questions and answers, covering the matter of the lecture. These are furnished to each member of the class in printed form, and must be copied into a book kept by each attendant for that purpose and committed to memory. An examination, written and oral, is held every three months. This series of printed questions and answers is regarded as especially important, since the amount of education and previous mental discipline in the case of the average attendant are not such as to enable him or her to study up any given subject without some explicit aid of the most direct, simple, and literal character.

The remainder of the year's instruction consists of three months' teaching of elementary matters connected with sanitation, care of the sick, and the usual applications, manipulations, apparatus, etc., required; also, what to do in emergencies. About four months more are occupied by anatomy and physiology, leading up to the study of the nervous system and the brain, which come last of all; and their presentation is coupled with such explanations of the working of mind in health and disease as can profitably be presented. The most practical character possible is given to each and every lecture; and, where it is possible to give the lecture the form of an object lesson by the use of apparatus, drawings, manipulations in presence of the class, use of skeleton, and anatomical preparations of all sorts, this is done.

The second year is a repetition of the first, with special instruction to advanced students in massage, bathing, use of battery, and all appliances that the treatment of the insane places in the hands of the attendant.

As a result of experience thus far obtained in the first year of the training-school at Kankakee, it may be said an improvement in the service has become plainly visible, not only directly from what the attendants have learned, but also from the new habits of study and observation which have been fostered by the school, and have created a new interest in their work on the part of attendants.

We have also been able to raise the standard in the character and quality of the persons engaged as attendants. The training-school gives a dignity and importance to the calling of attendant which it did not before possess, and attracts a more intelligent and worthy class of young men and women. Furthermore, by means of the training-school, a far greater average length of service is secured, the value and importance of which I need not explain. One practical result of our experience was the release of attendants from their agreement to stay two years. All attendants of the training-school are now permitted to give ninety days' notice, when wishing to leave; and this takes the place of the thirty days' notice which is customary with all other employees. The first regulation made in this respect was copied from the nurses' training-schools, but the different conditions of the insane hospital render it undesirable.

Experience in the development of a training-school for attendants shows some things to be desirable which are not yet provided for. One is more systematic instruction in the mechanical details of the ward work, such as bedmaking, cleaning, and general duties of the nature of housework, since many of the attendants have had no pre-

vious experience in this line; and it is necessary that all should at least understand how such work should be done. Another is the introduction of a person to permanently act as principal of the school, since the medical officers are too fully occupied with other duties to admit of their permanently managing the details of the training-school without other duties suffering thereby; although, in the inception of the enterprise, only the medical officers are competent to direct the work.

To sum up as briefly as possible the points involved in the foregoing pages, I would say:—

1. The calling of an attendant in an asylum, like every other vocation in life, needs training and apprenticeship; and, if there is any difference between that and other callings, it needs it *more* than most of the ordinary forms of service in public institutions. This is amply illustrated by the practical results of the present method (or lack of method), which is attended with considerable public dissatisfaction and marked by the occurrence from time to time of unfortunate cases of neglect or mistreatment, which are far more the result of *ignorance* than of any wrong intention on the part of asylum attendants, but which, unhappily, convey exaggerated impressions of misdoing to the public mind, and result in the loss, in some measure, of the public confidence which every public institution should command.

2. The training-school for attendants upon the insane, though in part an outgrowth of the training-schools for nurses, has an essentially different character,—requires much that a sick-nurse does not need to know; while, on the other hand, much of the nurse's instruction would be thrown away on the asylum attendant. Indeed, it may be said that, so far as the bodily sick among the insane are concerned, their care could be best provided for by employing graduate trained nurses; while, for the care of all other classes of the insane, the trained nurse of the general hospital is no better fitted by reason of a course in a training-school for sick-nurses.

3. While the work of nursing the sick is peculiarly a woman's work, the proper care of the insane requires an equal number of trained attendants of each sex.

4. The persons who are willing to engage in the care of the insane as attendants do not possess the education and previous mental training which would be desirable, if attainable; and, therefore, their instruction must be of the most direct, plain, and simple character, commencing with elementary matters and reducing all subjects pre-

sented to the lowest terms of simplicity and clearness, and differing in this from much of the instruction that the picked classes of the nurses' training-schools can readily receive.

Finally, a training-school for attendants is desirable in every institution for the insane for the following reasons:—

1. The care of the insane is a calling which demands skill and intelligence of a high order.
2. The average attainments of those who seek such employment are not of a high order, and need to be improved by every possible means.
3. Greater permanency of service and more experienced attendants will be secured by the training-school.
4. An improvement will take place in the character of the persons who will seek such service.
5. The administration of institutions for the insane will be more satisfactory to the public, because more intelligent and more conscientious.

